

Dupl Clarke Dec^r 18th 1843

A

SERIOUS ADDRESS

TO

UNLEARNED CHRISTIANS, &c.

U

C

41

A
SERIOUS ADDRESS
TO
UNLEARNED CHRISTIANS
OF TRINITARIAN AND
CALVINISTIC SENTIMENTS.
BY AN UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED IN THE YEAR MDCCXCII.

t
v
t
o
v
v
y
fo
in
a
w
h
a
th
I

A

SERIOUS ADDRESS, &c.

MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

I USE this form of speech in order to particularize the persons whom I am addressing; namely, those who, not having had the benefit of a liberal education, are not acquainted with the learned languages or with ecclesiastical history. And I hope that you will excuse the freedom of a few plain hints on a very important subject. I take it for granted, that you have been trained up, to a reverence for the scriptures, and to a sincere value for the truth taught in them. In cherishing this reverence for scripture, and this love for scripture-truth, you certainly do well. Religious truth is that which every one, who has a capacity for enquiry, should ardently pursue: and the discoveries made in scripture on subjects of the greatest consequence are of inestimable worth. I cannot then wonder, that when you are told, by

those in whom you are accustomed to place a confidence, that this or that particular system of divinity degrades God, vilifies the saviour, undermines christianity, or strips it of its fundamental doctrines, and pours contempt on scripture, you are ready to listen to these insinuations, to think with horror of the system, and to regard with aversion all who maintain it. But, my friends, it is possible that your teachers may have given you wrong information, and may have endeavoured to prejudice you against the system particularly referred to, without being themselves acquainted with its nature and tendency. Be not afraid to enquire and to judge for yourselves. It is your duty to enquire; and, in regard to many arguments produced in the debate, you are sufficiently qualified for judging. Be not afraid of truth, or of its consequences, wherever it may appear to be found. It never did, and never can do, any one any harm. Cherish an honest love of truth, an indifference to every thing but truth. And be pleased to remember, that those, who have departed the farthest from the religious system which you have embraced, can have no possible motive to it but the same love of truth; which they pursue with as much solicitude as any others of their fellow-christians, and which they think they have found in a set of opinions very different from theirs. It cannot, it cannot, be the real intention of any professor of christianity, to
misrepresent

misrepresent its doctrines, or to vilify its illustrious Author. Be intreated then to attend with calmness and patience to a few observations, which may serve to throw a little light upon the subject, and to do justice to the character and conduct of some of your fellow-professors upon whom the most injurious reflections have been cast.

§ 1. You have heard, no doubt, of different systems of religious truth, which have been adopted by different persons, and which have been called Trinitarian or Antitrinitarian, Calvinistic or Arminian, &c. But let me ask you, are these several systems to be considered as any other than the opinions of particular persons concerning the doctrines of christianity? The Athanasian doctrine was certainly the opinion of Athanasius; the Arian, that of Arius; the Socinian, that of Socinus; the Calvinistic, that of Calvin; the Arminian, that of Arminius. They were the opinions which these particular persons entertained concerning the truths of the gospel. They have been received by others, either according to the apprehended strength of the arguments by which their proposers supported them, or according as they were favoured by particular bishops or emperors. But still, by whomsoever proposed or received, or howsoever supported, they were originally no more than the particular opinions of him who proposed them, and still are no more than the particular opinions of those who embrace them.

§ 2. Is it not, therefore, great arrogance in any one set of fallible men, to assert with positiveness that their own particular opinions are the very fundamentals of christianity, and to charge those who differ from them with denying the fundamentals of the christian faith? Will any one pretend to say, that either Athanasius, Arius, or Socinus, either Calvin or Arminius, or any one of those who have since thought like any of them, was an infallible judge of controversy, an unerring interpreter of scripture? Must it not then be great arrogance and presumption, and that in every one alike, to assert with confidence, that his system of divinity is the very essence of christianity, and that those who do not agree with him are endeavouring to subvert the whole gospel by rejecting what is essential to it? How can such bold assertions as these, and especially how can such rash censures of others, be consistent with acknowledging that no one is infallible? It is allowed that in proportion as any person, after full and fair enquiry, thinks he has attained the truth, he is justified in saying that he believes himself to be possessed of it. But ought not all persons to reflect, that they are still liable to error, that perhaps their confidence may arise from want of farther information, and that others have the same right of judging for themselves which they have? If they do not, why do they disown a claim to infallibility? On this principle, though at one time they disown it, at another they really maintain

tain it, and act as if they could prove a title to it. Is not this conduct altogether inconsistent with that right of private judgment, which, as all agree, belongs to every one? And must it not be wholly destructive of all christian candour and brotherly kindness? If every one will maintain that his own particular tenets are essential to christianity, and that all who differ from him reject the fundamentals of christianity: how can that spirit of harmony and friendship exist among the professors of it, upon which our blessed master hath laid so great a stress?

§ 3. But it is worth while to enquire particularly what is declared in the New Testament itself to be fundamental to christianity. I therefore refer you, my friends, to the history of Jesus Christ as given by the four evangelists, and to that of the apostles as recorded by Luke, where you have an account, of the travels of Jesus and his apostles, of what they preached, and of the terms upon which they admitted their converts into the number of professed christians. These you are able to understand as well as the most learned of your teachers. Read them for yourselves. And judge for yourselves, whether that which the gospel-histories were written to promote the belief of—that which the miracles of Jesus were intended to prove—that which the labours, the preaching, the miracles of his apostles, were all designed to confirm and to propagate—that the acknowledgement of which

was deemed sufficient to entitle a person to christian baptism—was not simply this truth (when proposed to those who already acknowledge the being of one God) that Jesus was a messenger sent from God, or (in the language of the apostles, as soon as they were at liberty fully to declare their master's character and office) "the Christ." I appeal to yourselves, on an impartial study of the New Testament history, whether this was not the great article which was recommended to the faith of mankind, and the belief of which was esteemed sufficient to entitle them to the name and privileges of christians. I appeal to yourselves, whether there is, in the accounts which the evangelists and apostles give of their master, and of the great object of his mission, the slightest hint of the commonly received opinions of his proper deity and satisfaction as being *essential* to christianity. Read what he says of himself; and consider what it is, respecting himself, on which he lays the greatest stress. Read what the apostles, Peter and Paul, are recorded, in the history of their acts, to have said of him; and see what is the character in which they exhibit him. See whether they represent him as sustaining any higher character than that of a messenger from God, and whether they do not seem to have considered the belief and acknowledgement of this as the only thing fundamental to christianity (that is, when they were addressing those who worshipped

shipped the One only true God). Now, if this truth alone was considered by the first preachers of the gospel as fundamental to it, what right have others after them to invent new fundamentals, and to reproach those who do not submit to their usurped authority, as stripping christianity of what is essential to it?

§ 4. Since therefore nothing is declared, in the gospel itself, to be fundamental to christianity, beside this great truth, that Jesus is the Christ, or a messenger from God, consider farther, whether there is any thing wanting in that system on which such opprobrious names have been lavished, which can on its own account be supposed to be fundamental to it. The system referred to, is generally called the Unitarian or Socinian scheme. It is called Unitarian, because they who embrace it look upon themselves as the only class of christians who really and properly maintain the unity of God. This is the only name by which they wish to distinguish their sentiments, because it is taken, not from persons, but from opinions. Their peculiar principles are indeed often called Socinian, from Socinus, who was one of the first who in later times revived the original doctrine of the apostle Peter (Acts ii. 22.) that Jesus of Nazareth was a man *approved of* God by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did by him. But the scheme now called Socinian, differs very materially from that of Socinus. And therefore the de-

fenders of it do not chuse to take a name from the man himself; partly, because they think that this would intimate an approbation of all his peculiar tenets, which they do not really give to them; and partly, because they think that it would be like an acknowledgement of submission to his authority in matters of faith, which they intirely disavow. They prefer the name of Unitarians, because they imagine themselves to be the most consistent maintainers of the unity of God; a doctrine which, they think, has been undermined and subverted by the introduction of the Trinitarian scheme. I cannot express their sentiments more plainly than in the language of the apostle Paul (1 Tim. ii. 5.) that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men," (that is, the last and most distinguished revealer of the divine will) "the man Christ Jesus. Give me leave then to ask, is there any thing in this scheme which has the least tendency to overthrow the foundation of christian faith, obedience, or comfort? Consider it attentively; and judge for yourselves, whether the proper ground of our faith in Christ, of our obedience to him, of our expectations from him, is not secure upon the Unitarian system, at least as much as upon any other. And, if so, then think whether it can reasonably be said that this system strips christianity of any thing that is fundamental to it.

§ 5. As to the ground of christian faith, or, our belief that Jesus Christ was a messenger sent from
God.

God. Did not Jesus speak of himself repeatedly and plainly as one who was sent or commissioned by God? And yet is it possible that he should sustain this character, if, according to the Trinitarian scheme, he is either the very and eternal God, or a part of him, or another being equal to him? Must he not be a being distinct from God, and in the most proper sense a creature of God, if he is to be considered as a messenger from God? And must he not be a much more suitable messenger to men, on the supposition of his being himself one of the human race, than on any other? What then is the evidence by which his divine mission is proved? Is it not uniformly represented as arising from the miracles which God wrought by him, and especially from his resurrection from the dead? And does not the Unitarian system leave the christian in full possession of all this? Yea, is not the resurrection of Jesus considered as the resurrection of a man, a more satisfactory proof that he was sent from God to preach the resurrection of mankind, than we could possibly have on any other supposition? Allowing that Jesus was naturally a man, we see a knowledge and a power displayed in him which was vastly superior to that of mere man. And therefore certainly we have the greater warrant to conclude, that God was with him, and consequently that he was sent from God. Observe then, my christian friends, the ground of your faith in Christ, as sustaining that character under which he is always held

held forth in the gospel, is secure, yea, peculiarly firm, on the Unitarian Scheme. Admit this scheme, and you may easily conceive how he may be a messenger from God. And you see that distinction preserved, which the New Testament always maintains, between the Sender and the sent. On the Trinitarian Scheme, this distinction is lost; and, either the Sender and the sent are one and the same being, or the sent is totally independent of, and no way subject to Him that sent him.

§ 6. As to the ground of Christian Obedience. Ask yourselves what this is. Must you not acknowledge upon a little reflection, that it is the authority of God; exercised, not indeed for the purpose of shewing his own sovereignty, but to lead you in the best way to your own truest happiness? Now is not a precept delivered even by a Man, if that man is *approved* as a messenger from God by miracles and wonders and signs which God works by him, to be considered as coming from God, as much as if it were given immediately by a voice from heaven? You cannot but acknowledge that the laws given to the Israelites by the mouth of Moses, respecting the government of their state, or the observance of ceremonies, sacrifices and feasts, were as much binding upon them as the ten commandments, which were delivered with an audible voice from heaven. And why, but because Moses was proved to be a messenger from God by the wonderful miracles which
God

God wrought by him? And yet Moses was but a man; and not so much distinguished in point of knowledge or power, as the Unitarians suppose Jesus Christ to have been. If then the ground, upon which the obedience of the Israelites was demanded, remained unshaken, notwithstanding that the messenger of God to them was but a man, why should it be thought that the obligation, which christians are under to obey the precepts of the gospel, is undermined, if it be allowed that he who brought them was but a man? Do but consider the matter coolly and without prejudice; and I think you must allow that, whatever be the original rank and dignity of the messenger, the regard which you ought to pay to his message, and the obligation you are under to obey his commands, depend entirely on the proof he gives that he is sent from God; so that, if he brings sufficient evidence of this, you are equally bound to hear and reverence him, whether he be the highest of angels, or a mere man.

§ 7. As to the ground of christian comfort. Peculiar stress has been laid on this circumstance. And, by the manner in which many have expressed themselves upon it, you have been led to believe, that the state of mankind is quite desperate, and that they have no hope for time or eternity, unless Jesus Christ hath made full satisfaction to divine justice for their sins, in order to which they conceive that he must be some way or other an infinite Being. But, my christian friends,

friends, be not deceived by rash and confident assertions. Read the scriptures for yourselves; and think for yourselves, what is likely to be their genuine meaning, and what will make their doctrine consistent with itself, on this head. You are taught to build all your hope of the pardon of sin and of future happiness on a satisfaction made to divine justice for sins. Now, if Jesus Christ be (as it is the present fashion to call him) the only true God; the satisfaction he has given, must be paid to himself. And is this sufficient to answer the end proposed, to acquit the sinner of the demands of rigorous justice? or can it afford any solid ground of comfortable reliance? If Jesus be another God independent of, or equal to the Father, must it not follow that he is no subject of him who is the Lawgiver and Judge of men, and consequently that *his* good conduct cannot answer the demands of our moral Governor upon *us*? Observe too, that this satisfaction is said to be made by his sufferings and death. But, can God suffer? can God die? On the other hand, allow that Jesus Christ is one of the creatures of God, and it will indeed follow that he is a subject of the divine government, as much so as the meanest of them, let him be ever so exalted a being; but, let it be remembered, it will likewise follow, that he must obey the divine law for himself, and that no obedience which he has paid to it can satisfy the demands it makes upon us. The law of God requires obedience from
every

every one who is subject to it, and knows nothing of one creature obeying for another. Unless every one of them pays obedience to it, as far as it is made known to him, its demands are not satisfied. You have heard indeed of one person obeying commands, or suffering punishments instead of another. But, if you will use your own reason, you must certainly be convinced that this is a thing in its own nature absolutely impossible. One person may receive advantage from the obedience of another, or may suffer disadvantage from his disobedience. But it is impossible that obedience or punishment should be transferred, or that what is paid or endured by one person should answer the demands of law upon another. You will readily acknowledge that this is impossible under human governments; and a very little reflection might convince you that it is equally impossible under the divine. If these things are so then, where is the boasted satisfaction upon which you are taught to build all your hope; It is reduced to what is, in the very nature of things, impossible. If then the thing itself is an impossibility, why should general expressions of scripture have a particular sense forced upon them, or figurative texts be strained to a literal meaning, to make them teach it? Does scripture itself assert it in plain and positive terms, or lead you to derive all your comfort from it? And indeed, supposing that the doctrine is true, and that the satisfaction taken for granted has really been offered

to

to divine justice; what is your warrant for believing that it has been accepted? Must not this be, the promise and covenant of God, (I mean of Him, to whose authority *we* are subject, and on whose pleasure *our* happiness must depend) to accept it? After all, then, must not the ground of your hope and comfort ultimately be, the promise of God, whether respecting the pardon of sin, or the bestowment of future happiness? And, supposing the Unitarian system to be true, that Jesus was a man sent from God, who hath made the brightest discoveries of the love and mercy of God, and hath brought the most encouraging promises in the name of God; are you not left in full possession of this ground of comfort still? Are declarations of the original love and goodness of God less worthy of your regard, or are the promises of God of less value, because brought by one of the human race; if he is sufficiently proved to be a messenger from God? When you are led to consider God as a Father, who sent to save the world, because He loved the world; cannot you trust him? When you are assured, in the name of God, that He will forgive the trespasses of those who truly repent of and forsake their sins; cannot you believe the assurances? Why will you overlook the solemn promises of one who cannot lie, who is disposed of His free love and mercy to pardon penitent sinners, and chuse rather to rely on a supposed satisfaction made to His justice, which there is the greatest

greatest reason to think is in its own nature an absolute impossibility? Or why should you think the Unitarian system an enemy to your comfort, when it leaves you in full possession of that which is on all hands allowed to be ultimately the foundation of it? But besides, you are to consider that the system in question holds up to your regards another most important promise, as the great promise of the New Testament, that which above all has made the revelation of the gospel a blessing, and of which you have peculiar evidence on this system; and that is, a resurrection from the dead, and a future state of everlasting happiness for the righteous. This, like the promise of the pardon of sin, must have its foundation in the free love and goodness of God. Now, if He really intends that men shall in due time be raised from death, in order to their receiving according to their works, and that the righteous shall then be made everlastingly happy; how could He give a more full assurance of this His intention, than by raising from the dead a man distinguished for piety, benevolence and righteousness, and rewarding him with an endless life? If the Unitarian scheme be true then, He hath actually done this. Christ * is raised from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. While, as by man † came death, by man cometh also the resurrection of the dead; in as much as it is appointed that at his voice

* 1 Cor. xv. 20.

† ver. 21.

voice* *all* that are in the grave shall hereafter come forth; when God will judge the world in righteousness by that man † whom he hath ordained, who will then declare the divine approbation of all the pious and good, and take them to dwell for ever with himself. Is not this the plain, intellible, and unperturbed doctrine of the New Testament? If it is, I appeal to yourselves, whether there is any thing in the Unitarian System which undermines the ground of your comfort; or rather, whether it is not even more secure upon this system than upon any other.

And now, my christian friends, judge for yourselves, whether this system deserves to be vilified as stripping christianity of every thing fundamental to it. If the ground of christian faith, obedience and comfort remains uninjured by it; yea, is rendered by it more firm than by any other system of divinity, where is the damage or loss that christianity sustains from it? Nothing, surely, but ignorance of the real system can have given birth to the unjust aspersions that have been cast upon it.

§ 8. But, in the last place, it will surely be allowed that the great end of the christian revelation is to engage men to live soberly, righteously and godly in the world. I ask then, once more, whether the Unitarian System does not afford some peculiar assistance in, or encouragement to, such a life? You know that both reason and revelation enjoin the worship
of

* John v. 28.

† Acts xvii. 31.

of God. Now does not the Unitarian System remove the insuperable embarrassment with which the exercises of devotion are attended according to the Trinitarian Scheme ; by which you are led to worship you know not what, sometimes one Person, and sometimes three ? Again the New Testament inculcates a variety of duties as of the highest obligation, and of indispensable necessity. Is it not, upon the Unitarian System, a considerable encouragement to the practice of them, that you see them discharged, in the most exemplary manner, as far as the difference of situations would permit, by a man, who nobly resisted temptations similar to what you experience, and was eminent for the practice of virtues which are recommended to you ? Farther, as the Unitarian System rejects the notion of a full satisfaction paid to divine justice for the sins of men, does it not enforce the necessity of personal holiness in a manner peculiarly strong ? And, as it teaches that the pardon of sin, and eternal life and happiness, are the gifts of God's original mercy and love, bestowed freely, and not bought at the full price ; does it not lay a foundation, such as the scheme of satisfaction cannot afford, for the exercise of that gratitude and love to God, which are the most powerful, the most pleasing, and the most acceptable principles of obedience ? And lastly, as upon this supposition, you see distinguished piety and goodness most gloriously rewarded in the person of a man ; have you not here
the

the strongest possible motive to be steadfast and unmoveable in it? I ask yourselves, are not these very great assistances in, and encouragements to, a life of christian obedience; and such as are really peculiar to the Unitarian Scheme?

Upon the whole then, with how little reason is it, that this system is held up to public abhorrence, as if it struck at the foundation of christianity, and was designed to defeat the great end of the gospel and destroy its influence in the world! I hope, my christian friends, you see, that it retains every thing essential to christianity, and that its defenders may be at least as good christians as its opponents. Be not then frightened by hard names, from considering it attentively, and enquiring what there is to be said for it. Read the scriptures for yourselves; and see whether, taking in *the whole* of what they teach on any particular subject, there is not reason to believe, that upon the whole they are favourable to it. Consider the system itself; and see, whether, instead of degrading God, it does not represent him in a light peculiarly venerable and amiable; whether, instead of vilifying the Saviour, it does not ascribe to him the highest honour to which he is really entitled; whether, instead of undermining christianity, or stripping it of its fundamental doctrines, it does not hold forth gospel-truth in its native purity and glory; whether, instead of pouring contempt on scripture, it does not afford the most consistent and honourable

able view of its contents. Consider what is to be said in behalf of it; and see, whether there be not reason at least to behold the defenders of it with much more good-will than you are at present inclined to treat them with, yea, whether there be not some reason to think that the balance of argument is in their favour. You may believe me, my friends, there was a time, when christians of your class were as much astonished at and shocked by the proposal of the Trinitarian Scheme (as the patrons of that very scheme acknowledged) as you can possibly be at present by the mention of the opposite one. It was not with such as you, but with the Heathen Philosophers who had been converted to christianity, that the apostacy from the faith at first delivered to the saints began. And, 'till those additions to the gospel, which they first introduced, are entirely done away, its best friends do not expect that it will ever appear in its original glory, or exert its original influence on mankind. Accept the affectionate wish of a sincere friend to christianity and to you, that you may be led into the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; and that his glorious gospel, rightly understood and dutifully obeyed, may become the power of God to your salvation.

AN UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN.

[illegible]

... ..